



More than a Dozen Robots Entered in Teen Robotics Competition hosted by SIUE School of Engineering

by Nicole Franklin

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EDWARDSVILLE – For the second year in a row, [Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) School of Engineering (SOE) will host more than a dozen robots and their teen creators, families and spectators for a qualifying meet. Free to the public, the Southern Illinois Robotics League will take over the SOE atrium adhering to strict rules

in size and safety to bring loads of ingenuity and fun. The meet will take place on the SIUE campus on Saturday, December 9.

“Each robot has a personality,” said Jon Klingensmith, PhD, associate professor and chair of the department of electrical and computer engineering in SOE. “We named ours Dr. Evil.”

Klingensmith is an assistant coach of one of the 15 teams in the League.

“We started hosting events here and see kids from 7th to 12th grade from East St. Louis and Granite City, to a couple of home-schooled teams in the Mascoutah area. They also come from Centralia High School all the way down to Marion, who will send up two to three teams from their school.”

Area Illinois teams have three meets during what is considered a fall pre-season, which lead to the qualifying state tournament in Elgin, IL in February. Winning teams that secure the top four placements at State head to the world robotics competition, scheduled for Houston, Tx in April.

“These meets bring a competitive sports type vibe, but to STEM activities and kids learning how to do technology. These are youth who otherwise would not have these experiences to get together and have fun—and have fun doing robots. You can’t beat that,” said Klingensmith.

Teams with members aged four to 18 follow league rules and regulations of [For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, or FIRST®, a global nonprofit \(501\(c\)\(3\)\), which organizes team-based robotics programs.](#) FIRST® promotes their philosophy of Gracious Professionalism® and Coopertition® . Translation: The youth spend time helping each other when technology becomes challenging and teams need extra parts or maintenance.

“If somebody has a motor that goes bad, borrow from somebody else. They learn how to be gracious and professional,” said Klingensmith.

Eight to 10 youth per team are expected, which amounts to 150 young robotics engineers and their supporters bringing top skill and determination to the halls of the SOE atrium.

The day begins with robot inspections, confirming that each creation meets the size and safety requirements and absence of sharp objects. The SOE atrium offers the requisite 12ft x 12ft competition field.

For optimum viewing of all the matches, the public should arrive for this free event before 1pm.

A number of current SIUE SOE students are FIRST® alums “including the president of our solar car club,” said Klingensmith.

Teens in competition work year-round to compete. Klingensmith’s team meets three times per week, two to three hours at a time.

“We do more intensive sessions over holiday break,” he said. “It’s super cool to see these kids bring out their ideas, pick it up and do it all over again. They are improving constantly.”